



National Report on the implementation of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” Programme in Bulgaria for the Period 2000 – 2003

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Sofia

I.Context and methodology

Leonardo da Vinci is the action programme for implementing the European Community's vocational training policy. Its aim is to use transnational cooperation and accumulated experience to enhance quality, promote innovation and support the European dimension of vocational training systems and practices so as to enable Europe to become world quality reference for education and training until the year of 2010. The second phase of the “Leonardo da Vinci” programme is set out in the Council Decision of 26 April 1999 and its duration is for seven years (January 1, 2000 – December 31, 2006). It pursues three main aims: improve skills and competences of young people in the initial vocational training process; improve the quality of, and access to, continuing vocational training and the lifelong acquisition of skills and competencies, and promote and reinforce the contribution of vocational training to the process of innovation, with a view to improving competitiveness and entrepreneurship, also in view of new employment possibilities.

From national point of view, the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme represents means to achieve the objectives of the vocational education and training policy in Bulgaria according to the National Economic Development Plan, namely to bring and maintain the vocational and qualification level of the national labour force to a dynamic conformity with the changing conditions and needs of the economy and the European requirements and standards. The improved vocational education and training of the labour force in Bulgaria guarantees the creation of a more effectively functioning labour market in the country and the increase of competitiveness of the Bulgarian working force in the confines of the European Community's expanded labour market.

Pursuant to article 13 of Resolution N 382/1999/EC, which sets out the second phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, all participating countries should present at the European Commission reports for the programme implementation in the period 2000–2003. The main objective of the National report is first of all to evaluate the significance of the programme and its contribution at national level, as well as its effectiveness and efficiency. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Education and Science, which manage the programme politically at national level, undertake the organization and funding of the report elaboration activity. The conclusions and recommendations for the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme in Bulgaria for the period 2000-2003 made in this report are based on methodology used and interviews held by the ESTAT Research agency in the period between July, 15 and August, 15 2003. The agency held standard interviews with thirteen

representatives of organisations with awarded projects under the programme during the analysed period, and with five programme beneficiaries. The methodology includes also documentation analysis and holding of two working meetings with experts from the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency – a unit within the Human Resource Development Centre that manages the programme in Bulgaria at administrative level, whose main tasks are to support the projects during their implementation and horizontally to support the programme activities. This quantitative method gives opportunity to evaluate the programme strengths and weaknesses, its significance and effectiveness.

II. Performed activities

A. Analysis of factual and statistical data

1. Classification of activities

The statistical data for the submitted proposals under the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme for the period 2000-2003 indicate that the greatest number of project proposals is submitted by Bulgarian organizations every year under the “*Mobility*” measure, where the result could be seen in a short period of time. It is reported an even distribution of the proposals in a geographical aspect – almost 50 per cent are from organizations from Sofia and 50 per cent from the country. About two thirds of the proposals (i.e. projects under “Mobility” measure) are submitted in a mother tongue whereas projects under the other measures are submitted in English as it is the second most commonly used language in the applying procedures. Universities, training organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises and other organizations are the main promoters of projects under the programme.

In 2003 most of the submitted proposals lay special emphasis upon the interaction between the educational institutions and the production field. In 2001 and 2002 the greatest number of submitted proposals is focused on affording an opportunity for employment.

Germany, Greece, the United Kingdom, Italy and France, which have a significant experience in tourism, agriculture and high technologies, represent the main foreign country-partners to Bulgarian organizations, initiators of projects in the analyzed period.

It is important to be indicated and analyzed several basic parameters like **the programme budget, the entry ticket of Bulgaria, the legislatively-defined share for financing under the separate measures of the programme as well as the actual grants received by the**

Bulgarian organizations before having a more detailed look upon the number of the submitted proposals and of the approved for financing projects under the different programme measures with a view to drawing main conclusions for the quality of the submitted for financing proposals, on one hand, and for the share of the acquired funds granted under the program for Bulgaria, on the other.

Table 1

Total budget of “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme, entry ticket of Bulgaria and share of the entry ticket in the programme budget for the period 2000-2003

	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total programme budget (only for EU member states), euro	143 000 000	147 000 000	157 000 000	164 000 000
Entry ticket of Bulgaria, total, euro	3 024 000	3 108 000	3 318 000	3 465 000
Entry ticket for administrative costs, euro	24 000	24 000	24 000	24 000
Entry ticket for operational costs, euro	3 000 000	3 084 000	3 294 000	3 441 000
Share of the program budget, %	2.0979	2.0980	2.0981	2.0982

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

Table 2

Legislatively - defined share for financing under the different measures of “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme. Actual financing received. Balance and share of acquired funds granted under Procedures A, B and C for the period 2000-2003

Legislatively - defined share for financing	Actual breakdown	2000	2001	2002	2003
Procedure A = min. 39%	40.61%	1 218 000	1 252 482	1 340 385	1 376 400
Received financing under procedures B and C	47.16%	2 574 784	1 415 436	2 205 966	2 202 438
		Total planned financing under Procedures B and C			
Procedure B	42.04%	1 438 165	1 478 055	1 576 084	1 503 199
PP (pilot projects) = 34%	35.00%				
LA (language competencies) = 5%	5.00%				
TN (transnational networks) = 2%	2.04%				
Procedure C	5.12%				
RF (reference materials) = 3%	3.90%				
TH (thematic actions) = 2%	1.22%				
Balance (Procedures B and C)		1 136 619	-62 619	629 882	699 239
Acquired funds under Procedures B and C		179.03%	95.76%	139.97%	146.52%
Received financing under Procedures A, B and C, total		3 792 784	2 667 918	3 546 351	3 578 838
Planned financing under Procedures A, B and C, total		2 656 165	2 730 537	2 916 469	2 879 599
Acquired funds under Procedures A, B and C		142.79%	97.71%	121.60%	124.28%

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

Table 1 and **Table 2** data indicate that the level of the acquired funds under **Procedures A, B** and **C** has been significantly over 100 per cent in all the years of the analyzed period (2000-2003) of “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme. This proves the great interest for participating in the programme expressed by the Bulgarian organizations as well as the high quality of the submitted for financing proposals for projects in the area of vocational education and qualifications by the Bulgarian project promoters. The high effectiveness of the programme in Bulgaria can be proved by the fact that the entry ticket of Bulgaria is only 2 per cent of the total budget for the 15 member states of the EU whereas the acquired funds are over 100 per cent.

Main conclusions, which can be drawn on the basis of the statistical data, are:

- significant interest towards “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme;
- high level of the acquired funds under all programme procedures;
- high effectiveness of the programme in Bulgaria reported as a correlation between the invested resources and the achieved results;
- high quality of the submitted project proposals by the Bulgarian project promoters.

Projects under Procedure A

Procedure A covers measure “**Mobility**”. It is decentralised and is managed at national level in each participating country. Mobility projects provide opportunity to the potential beneficiaries to acquire practical vocational experience abroad, which main objective is to enhance the link between training and practice, investigate the foreign experience and improve the language competences in the field of vocational training. Table 3 represents data about the number of submitted proposals under the “**Mobility**” measure and the number of projects, which received funding under this measure for the period 2000-2003. On the one hand they provide a possibility to evaluate the change in the declared by the Bulgarian organisations interest for applying for funding under this program measure, and, on the other hand, indirectly assess the quality of projects.

Table 3

Number of submitted and approved projects under procedure A for the period 2000 - 2003

<i>“Placements”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	69	54	44	79
Approved	27	24	26	32
<i>“Exchanges”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	28	26	26	45
Approved	9	10	6	9

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

In the period under review what draws attention is the fact that the number of submitted proposals under the **“Placement”** activity decreases (from 69 in 2000 to 44 in 2002), but the number of the approved projects for funding stays almost unchanged. The great number of submitted proposals in 2002 was due to additional call for proposals, published in Bulgaria, because of the insufficient number of good projects.

Here it is important to be underlined that **the number of beneficiaries under projects of “Placement” activity is increasing every year (from 538 persons in 2000 to 543 persons in 2001, 600 persons in 2002 and 693 persons in 2003). It proves that every year an increasingly number of young people have an opportunity for practising in EU member states, acquiring new labour arrangements, getting to know modern production technologies and last but not least acquiring general condition of capable and competent people.** This is the result of the continuous rise of national installments for the programme in which the mobility funds are over 40%.

A significant increase of the submitted proposals (79) as well as a great increase of the projects approved for funding can be observed only in 2003. One interpretation of this tendency is that most of the projects are for a period longer than one year. The greater number of submitted proposals in 2003 indicates that applying organisations already know and realise the benefit from the upgrading of the vocational training and qualifications for youth programme in Bulgaria. The greater number also indicates that the quality of the submitted proposals for financial support under the programme has improved. Those companies and organisations, which apply for the second or third time under the programme, prove the importance of their projects at local or national levels, which determines the necessity of projects development through the participation of new target groups and new

partners from other participating countries in the programme. On the other hand those companies and organizations appreciate the benefit of the development of their organizations through human resource development.

The data about submitted and approved projects under the **“Exchange”** activity during the period 2000-2002 also indicate the tendency towards decrease of the number of submitted proposals and funded projects. Many of the projects which haven’t been approved for the first two years were copies of projects under “Tempus” programme which didn’t comply with “Leonardo da Vinci” aims and priorities. **Once more, only in 2003 the number of submitted proposals is considerably greater. However, the number of the approved projects under the “Exchanges” activity stays relatively stable, which is due to the stated break down of finance on target groups and number of beneficiaries in Operating plans on mobility.**

Table 4

Number of funded projects under the Mobility measure for the period 2000-2003, by beneficiaries

<i>“Placements” – number of funded projects for:</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
pupils	9	10	9	11
students	9	5	10	9
workers	9	9	7	12
Total number of beneficiaries	538	543	600	693
<i>“Exchanges” - number of funded projects for:</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
managers	6	8	5	9
teachers	3	2	1	0
Total number of beneficiaries	119	83	74	102

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

The statistical data about the number of funded projects under the **“Mobility”** measure by beneficiary for the period 2000-2003 indicate that every year the total number of beneficiaries in **“Placement”** activity increases against relatively constant number of funded projects in this same category. Also every year the number of total beneficiaries in “Exchanges” category decreases versus relatively constant number of funded projects in this category. An increase of the total number of beneficiaries in the **“Exchanges”** can be observed only in the year 2003, which can be explained with the greater number of

submitted proposals in this activity as well as with the greater interest of enterprise managers, teachers and language experts in the acquisition of vocational experience abroad.

The larger number of submitted proposals under the “**Mobility**” measure can be explained by:

- the writing of the projects under the “Mobility” measure in a mother tongue which is easier;
- the high interest for preparation of the young people for their forthcoming professional career, which can be achieved only by practice in a suitable environment as well as by becoming well acquainted with a new working culture and aspiration for seeing the socio-cultural life in foreign countries;
- the necessity of a single partner for fulfilling of the project;
- opportunities for the companies to receive financial funds if they develop the skills of the staff;
- results achieved in a short period of time.

The philosophy of the Mobility projects differs from that of the Pilot projects, which predetermines the necessary capacity of the organization – initiator of a project. Most of the organizations, which submit projects under the **Mobility** measure, do not have the capacity to fulfill a research project. It is not a disadvantage but proves the high interest of the Bulgarian organizations for fulfilling projects under this particular programme measure – “**Mobility**”.

Projects under Procedure B

Table 5

Number of submitted and approved projects under Procedure B for the period 2000-2003

<i>“Pilot projects”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	77	56	47	41
Approved	3	3	9	8
<i>“Language competences”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	11	8	5	6
Approved	3	1	0	1
<i>“Transnational networks”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	2	1	1	0
Approved	0	0	0	0

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

The statistical data about the “*Pilot projects*”, “*Language competences*” and “*Transnational networks*” under Procedure B for the period 2000-2003 indicate that during the years the number of submitted proposals constantly decreases. That is because in the period reviewed 2000-2003 there is not even one approved and implemented project under the “*Transnational networks*” measure. The number of approved and implemented projects under “*Language competences*” measure is also too small but it is dependent on the available money for this measure, defined in the Decision of the EU Council.

The lack of interest towards “*Transnational networks*” measure is defined by the unclear explanation of the measure in the direction for promoters, the required financial contribution of 50 per cent, the obstacles in net developing as well as by the lack of known foreign partners in the field of vocational training. Moreover, these projects require collaboration with NGOs as well as collaboration with training institutions, public institutions, organizations of social partners and employers’ organizations, which additionally hampers the applying Bulgarian organizations. The participation of social partners in solving the questions about the vocational education of the current and future labour force is not an approved practice not only in Bulgaria but in many European countries as well.

The approval of projects under “*Language competencies*” measure should be examined in the context of the whole number of approved projects on a European Commission level. In 2000, for example, the European Commission financed 20 projects under this project measure, of which three are Bulgarian (look Table 6). It proves the high quality of the Bulgarian proposals. It should be noted that a financial support for acquisition of foreign language competencies could be received under “Sokrates” programme where the projects are submitted in mother tongue, whereas the projects under “*Language competencies*” of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme are submitted in foreign language oriented towards vocational education and training.

In order to analyze the extent to which Bulgaria uses the potential of “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme for encouraging and developing of innovations and quality of the professional education and training, for increasing of the language competencies as well as for stimulating the exchange of experience and positive practices of European significance several factors as a whole for 31 programme member states should be taken into account: **the number of the fulfilled projects under this procedure; the level of the acquired funds; the share of the entry ticket of Bulgaria in the total budget of the programme**

member states; the relation between the fulfilled projects on a national level and on an European level.

Table 6

Number of fulfilled projects under “Language competencies” measure, “Pilot projects” measure and “Transnational networks” measure on a national and on a European level for the period 2000-2003 with Bulgarian promoters

year	level	Procedure B		
		Language competencies (LA)	Pilot projects (PP)	Transnational networks (TN)
2000	Bulgaria	3	3	0
	31 member states	20	174	11
2001	Bulgaria	1	3	0
	31 member states	25	204	14
2002	Bulgaria	0	9	0
	31 member states	20	230	15

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

Although the number of the fulfilled projects under “*Language competencies*” measure, “*Pilot projects*” measure and “*Transnational networks*” measure in Bulgaria is relatively small in comparison with the number of the submitted proposals, Table 6 data indicate that the submitted proposals under Procedure B in Bulgaria are of high quality. The number of the fulfilled projects, initiated by Bulgaria, is relatively great if it is taken into account the population and area of the country and the high level of the funds acquired under this programme procedure by Bulgaria.

Projects under procedure C

Procedure C is totally centralised and covers projects submitted by European organisations under all programme measures. Still Bulgaria has not benefited enough from the support, which the European Union can provide for the creation and updating of a comparable database in the vocational education and training area, as well as for the observation and dissemination of the successful practices and extensive information exchange among the Member States involved in the programme. The *Reference material* makes it possible to account for the changes in the National vocational training systems at European Union level,

to make conclusions and give recommendations to every Member State, so that in the year 2010 Europe can turn into the “most-dynamically developing economy, based on knowledge”. It should be noted that for the last two selection years only projects initiated by European Union member states have received financial support under this measure, which is probably due to the fact that Bulgarian promoters are not aware of European vocational education and training systems.

Table 7

Number of submitted and approved projects under Procedure C for the period 2000-2003

<i>“Thematic actions”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	5	3	3	4
Approved	1	0	0	0
<i>“Reference material”</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003
Submitted proposals	2	1	3	1
Approved	0	0	0	0

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

The data about the submitted and approved projects under Procedure C for the period 2000-20003 indicate the total lack of initiative of the Bulgarian interested organizations to apply under this measure of the Leonardo da Vinci II programme, as well as the lower quality of the submitted proposals. Under the “*Thematic actions*” and “*Reference material*” measures for the period 2000-2003 there is only one project approved and implemented (under “*Thematic actions*” measure in 2000). The fact that in 2000 on a European commission level there have been approved only two projects under “*Thematic actions*” measure, one of which is Bulgarian (look Table 8), indicates the high quality of the submitted proposal. For the period 2001-2003 there are no approved Bulgarian proposals.

The lack of interest of the Bulgarian project promoters towards Procedure C is determined above all by unsatisfactory presentation of the specifics of Bulgarian processes and reforms in the vocational education and training systems and adult training activities for the professional qualification acquisition.

Table 8

Number of fulfilled projects under “Reference materials” and “Thematic actions” measures on a national and on a European commission level for the period 2000-2002

Year	Level	Procedure C	
		Reference materials (RF)	Thematic actions (TH)
2000	Bulgaria	0	1
	31 member states	20	2
2001	Bulgaria	0	0
	31 member states	7	5
2002	Bulgaria	0	0
	31 member states	11	4

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

2. Nature of funded activities

Only under the “*Mobility*” measure the participating countries can announce their national priorities considering the decentralized character of Procedure A.

Within the call for proposals 2000-2002, Bulgaria has not taken the advantage of the announcement of national priorities. Within the call for proposals 2003-2004 under the “*Mobility*” measure of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme, Bulgaria announced four national priorities, which could help in achieving the main aim of the vocational education and training policy in Bulgaria (in compliance with Governmental National Economic Development Plan and Governmental plans in Education and science and Social policy and labour market areas) - bring and maintain the vocational and qualification level of the national labour force to a dynamic conformity with the changing conditions and needs of the economy and the European requirements and standards. The announced national priorities are:

- Prevent from unemployment through anticipating and innovative training
- Interaction between the training institutions and the production environment
- Opportunity for qualification and employment for people with reduced work efficiency
- Enhance the quality of vocational training and qualification on occupations in the services, tourism and agriculture sectors.

For the period 2000-2002 the implemented actions under the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme in Bulgaria are connected mostly to the improvement of the skills and competences of young people in the initial vocational training process, as well as to the reinforcement of the link between vocational training and its practical application.

Predominant part of the implemented projects during this period is from the “*Placements*” and “*Exchanges*” activities under procedure A, whereas the acquired vocational experience by pupils, students, workers, managers and teachers abroad helps for better realization of the youth on the labour market; it provides the small and medium enterprises with the opportunity to get familiar with the experience of leading foreign companies in the respective field; to establish contacts and cooperate with them; to create products, which are principally new for the business in our country; provides vocational mobility to the youth and upgrades the quality of vocational education and training in the country. Young people learn to work in a foreign language environment, they learn to be independent, responsible and accurate, which leads to increasing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian labour force within the expanded European union labour market.

The implemented projects in the period under review have encouraged entrepreneurship among the beneficiaries, they have enhanced the partnership between Bulgarian and foreign organizations in the area of vocational education and training and have helped for the introduction of know-how in the educational and production sectors.

For the period 2000-2003 under Procedure A of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme seven projects in total have been approved and implemented (1 out of 36 in 2000, 2 out of 34 in 2001, 2 out of 32 in 2002 and 2 out of 41 in 2003), with disabled people as final beneficiaries, who are one of the most disadvantaged groups on the labour market. It is necessary to encourage the elaboration of such projects, because they support the integration of disabled people into working environment.

In the period of transition towards market economy, as a result of the economy restructuring, the link between the educational and production systems was destroyed, which led to high level of unemployment in the country, fall of the population living standard and to ineffective functioning labour market in general. It is necessary for the Bulgarian education system to adapt to the new vocational requirements of the business, to introduce new and more-effective methods of vocational training in the education system and in the incentives for adult vocational training, to enhance the language and technological skills with

professional orientation of the young people and last but not least – to foster partnership between the various participants from the different vocational education and training areas. The role of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme in achieving these goals is undoubted.

For the period 2000-2002 Bulgaria did not take the advantage of determining particular national priorities in the fields of Education, Social policy and Labour market, in accordance with its National Economic Development plan, which could have been used as a ground for political analyses and law incentives. However, the defined by the European Commission priorities in the area of vocational education and training, which help Europe to become the “most dynamically developing economy in the world, based on knowledge” until 2010, are in force for Bulgaria, which is expected to become a full member of the European Union in 2007. The National priorities under the “**Mobility**” measure for 2003-2004 principally do not replace the priorities presented in the call for proposals 2003-2004 and their observance is neither compulsory nor does it affect the ranking of the projects but taking them in account will help achieving the main objective of the vocational education and training policy in Bulgaria.

The data from the interviews held with representatives of organisations with awarded projects, as well as with beneficiaries, indicate that the basic reasons for participation in the programme relate to their own willingness to successfully integrate in the labour environment so as to become more competitive, get to know the life in the Member States, establish contacts with foreign organisations in the area of vocational education and training and last but not least – improve their language skills and competences.

A conclusion could be drawn that the implemented projects under the “**Mobility**” measure encourage mobility mainly in neighbouring countries, with similar living standard, as in the far European countries such as Ireland, Great Britain and Iceland the project realisation is expensive and entry visas and travel expenditures made the project more expensive.

The main sectors, in which the Bulgarian beneficiaries under the “**Mobility**” measure receive practical experience abroad, are agriculture, tourism and high technologies.

The selection of foreign partners to implement projects under the “**Mobility**” measure in the field of agriculture depends mostly on the latitude, which determines the applicability in Bulgaria of the acquired abroad vocational skills in the area of agriculture and forestry. Often the partners of the Bulgarian project promoters in this area come from European countries along the Mediterranean Sea. In the field of tourism the main foreign partners

come from countries with traditions in this field, such as Greece, Spain and Portugal. German organizations are preferable to the Bulgarian project promoters as foreign partners in the field of high technologies.

The “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme supports also mutual actions with other European Union programmes, especially with Socrates and Youth. At national level there is coordination between the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme and other Community educational initiatives such as the EQUAL programme connected with the vocational training at working place and with European social fund and with the “Socrates” programme. There is no overlap of objectives, priorities and implemented projects, but only available common ideas.

3. Results

The results achieved could be looked for at organisation level and at individual level. It is difficult to talk about considerable sectoral and/or national importance of the projects, though projects under the “**Mobility**” measure are characterised with a certain degree of multiplication of individual benefits. On one hand this is due to comparatively small number of financed projects and on the other - to the fact that only two *Pilot* and one *Language* projects are completed. Most of the interviewed shared that they had organised public presentations on the accumulated experience, knowledge and skills during their practical training. The effect for the beneficiaries is extremely positive in terms of the possibility to make a comparison between the acquired vocational knowledge and experience in Bulgaria and the developed models in the vocational training in the leading in economic development West-European countries. The interviewed reckon that the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme provides opportunities to build willingness in the youth for life-long learning in their initial stage of vocational training, on the basis of moral values.

Fast and individual influence on beneficiaries after project implementation under the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme can be observed with the pupils, students, young people, workers, teachers and managers of Bulgarian small and medium enterprises, who have been end beneficiaries of projects under the “**Mobility**” measure. The interviewed beneficiaries on these projects share that as a result of the implemented projects they have: obtained a broader view on the innovations in the vocational training methodology; enriched their own language preparation; established contacts with highly prepared experts and have accumulated knowledge and experience in the respective vocational area. They expect that

this will help them in future realization on the labor market. The students who participated in projects under the program think that they have better position on the Labor market as a result of the acquired in the other country vocational experience and language competences with professional orientation. The young workers who have obtained vocational experience abroad are full of ideas and motivated to develop their entrepreneurial spirit and initiative in the near future. The teachers who participated in projects under the “*Exchange*” activity think that they have improved their teaching methods and they can see the contribution of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme to the improvement of the quality of the vocational education and training in Bulgaria.

According to the project promoters the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme is very well targeted, has high effectiveness upon the implementation of every single project and has clear priorities. The participation of many years of certain organizations in the educational field help them to build a public image of modern and open organizations. The interviewed representatives of project promoters under the programme share that they keep maintaining contacts and develop their cooperation with the foreign partners after the projects completion.

The actions funded under the programme for the period 2000-2003 help in improving the language training and teaching mainly at individual level, improve the quality of vocational training also mainly individually, facilitate the access to training of target groups (disadvantaged groups) and enhance the cooperation between the training organisations and companies, mostly SMEs, which are main employment source in the country.

The actions funded under the programme introduce the European dimension in the context of vocational training, because they create vocational mobility for youth, and also the cognitive process is guaranteed. The interviews with the beneficiaries on the projects disclose that they are completely aware of their participation in activities of European dimension and are very interested to investigate the European experience in the field of vocational training in Bulgaria.

B. Conclusions

The “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme actively supports life-long learning, encourages the use of modern information and communication technologies, stimulates the participation of SMEs, which create employment, provides support to the disadvantaged groups on the Labour market, provides equal opportunities for men and women on the labour market and

enhances partnership among various participants from different vocational training areas. The implemented measures under the programme particularly:

- help in improving the skills and competences of young people in the process of their initial vocational training (which is the priority of the programme's second phase);
- enhance the link between the vocational training and its practical application (priority of the programme's second phase);
- create possibilities for contacts and cooperation among national and foreign organizations in the vocational training area and employment (priority determined by the European Commission for the period 2000-2002);
- encourage the introduction of new training methods and tools (priority determined by the European Commission for the period 2000-2002);
- enhance the interaction between the educational and production areas (National priority under the "Mobility" measure for the period 2003-2004 and priority in the Call for proposals 2000-2002);
- improve the vocational training quality in the tourism, agriculture and services sectors (National priority under the "Mobility" measure for the period 2003-2004).

The importance of the implemented projects under the programme for the period 2000-2003, which come mainly under the "**Placement**" and "**Exchange**" activities help young people in Bulgaria to improve their language competences, appreciate the vocational training quality in the Member States, make a comparison with the level of vocational training in Bulgaria in the areas of tourism, agriculture and high technologies, etc. and last but not least – obtain self-confidence and motivation for successful realization on the expanded European Union Labor Market. The Bulgarian teachers, who take part in the projects under "**Exchanges**" activity have the opportunity to enrich their vocational experience; obtain ideas for quality improvement of the vocational training in Bulgaria; introduce new training methods, establish contacts with colleagues from the Member States, as well as motivate their colleagues in Bulgaria to introduce new training methods and constantly to seek ways to improve their vocational competences in compliance with the World tendencies and practices, which guarantees qualitative training for the youth in Bulgaria.

Innovations in the vocational training national systems and national practices are principally supported through the "**Pilot projects**" and "**Reference materials**" under the "Leonardo da Vinci" programme. The "**Pilot projects**" under the programme can help in improving the quality of vocational training in Bulgaria through the development of new methods,

manuals, learning materials, etc., while the “**Reference materials**” could present to the politicians in the vocational training area an updated database containing the vocational training successful practices and surveys for the new qualification needs in Europe, which can be used as a basis for re-directing the vocational training system in the country in compliance with the current requirements toward the business labour force and the new Bulgarian economy structure and in conformity with the European dimension of vocational training. Thus the labor market in Bulgaria will become more flexible and the living standard in the country will be raised. The approved pilot projects in the period under review (2000-2003) are very important for the development of qualitative vocational training in the country, which means that the promotion of such projects on behalf of Bulgarian organisations must be encouraged, as well as the participation of Bulgarian partners in pilot projects promoted on behalf of foreign organisations on one hand, and on the other to encourage dissemination of project results on all levels – national, regional and sectoral. Part of the implemented projects under the “**Mobility**” measure help in the more successful integration of disadvantaged groups into the labor market. Also they encourage the equality between men and women in entrepreneurship.

C. Recommendations

On the basis of interviews held with experts familiar with the programme and with representatives of organisations with awarded projects under the evaluated period 2000-2003, several recommendations can be drawn about the “Leonardo da Vinci” programme in terms of which actions should continue to develop and which should not, also which ones are up to enhancement.

Due to the incomplete documentation and small funding the “**Transnational networks**”, which are directed at exchange of experience and positive practices at European scale are also subject to criticism on behalf of promoters. It is recommended to orientate the funds from these measures to other programme measures, namely the “**Language competences**” for vocational needs with sectoral purpose, which concern specific needs of separate vocational sectors, “**Pilot projects**”, which encourage the use and application of modern information and communication technologies, as well as the actions under the “**Mobility**” measure, which need bigger financing due to the low stay expenses (for example the maximum ammount for pupils’ placement is 4 300 euro for 9 months, which means about 16 euro/day). During the period under review no Bulgarian organisations had awarded projects under the “**Reference materials**” measure, which finances surveys, observations and

analyses of successful practices in vocational training in Europe. The results of this programme measure projects, directed mainly at the employees who take management decisions in the area of vocational training, would help in the transformation of the Bulgarian vocational education and training system in compliance with the European achievements in this area and the specific Bulgarian labour market needs.

The national agency, which administratively manage the programme on a national level have to enhance the active promotion of the programme on local level.

III. Management procedures

A. Analysis of factual data

1. Decentralized activities

Nationally the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme is managed by the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency, which has been established on 1 April 1998. Aiming at more detailed information for the interested persons in the programme, a network of five regional agencies in the towns of Bourgas, Varna, Pleven, Plovdiv and Russe have been established. **Table 9** data indicate the size of the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency’s funding from the budgets of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) for the period 2001-2003.

Table 9

Size of the Leonardo da Vinci National Agency’s funding from the budgets of MES sand MLSP for the period 2001-2003

	2001	2002	2003
From the MES and MLSP budgets (in EUR)	458 272	685 437	990 172
Contribution for the participation of Bulgaria in the Leonardo da Vinci II programme "	301 000	518 000	815 000
Costs of the Leonardo da Vinci National Agency	132 480	141 687	148 972
Costs of the Careers Guidance National Resource Center	24 792	25 750	26 200

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”, Decision 535/27.7.2000 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria

The main problem with the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency’ funding is that it is very much delayed in time. The lack of national financing makes practically impossible the performance of great part of the tasks negotiated between the Agency and the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission. This puts the National Agency in difficult situation

upon the establishment of environment for preparing qualitative projects on behalf of the Bulgarian promoters.

Analysis of procedures

On the basis of the interviews held with representatives of organisations with awarded projects under the programme for the period 2000-2003, it may be asserted that information the organizations obtain about the programme comes primary from acquaintances. Then come the advertising ads in the national press. This sequence is very much valid for the organizations from the country.

Bulgarian promoters apply in the programme following either of the two models for selection of project aims. The first model could be described as follows: The project promoters first identify a specific problem and then look for programmes of the European community or other donors, which can provide funding to resolve the problem. The other model represents a totally reverse process. The potential project promoters first get familiar with the “Leonardo da Vinci” programme and the areas of funding, after that they “come up” with a problem, the solving of which leads to applying for programme financing.

The Bulgarian organizations with awarded projects under the programme appreciate the website of the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency and think it has extremely useful database with potential partners. A great part of the interviewed representatives of organisations that have received funding under the programme for this period declare that they have found a partner through this website. As a shortcoming of the electronic database which exists on European level, project promoters point out the impossibility to obtain additional information on the foreign organisations, which are potential partners of the Bulgarian ones.

Some project promoters admit that they have received information from the regional units of the National Agency and from the seminars, which the Agency organises for potential Bulgarian project promoters.

The applying procedures under the programme are strictly determined. There are no identified problems when applying under the Procedures A and B. The mobility projects are evaluated by Bulgarian independent experts. Under Procedure A projects are submitted in Bulgarian language. The selected projects are approved by the Management council of the programme in Bulgaria, then the information is sent to the European commission, after that

the promoters of selected projects are informed about the results and contracts are signed with them.

The main reasons for non selection of projects under Procedure A are:

- not well elaborated and developed aims and ideas;
- lack in conformity with the programme priorities for the reference period;
- not good argumentation of the project management or budget.

Procedure B is semi-centralized and procedures under these measures are evaluated at European and national level. The National Agency organises an evaluation procedure and proposal ranking by Bulgarian independent experts. The Management Council of the programme in Bulgaria approves lists with all evaluated projects on a pre-proposal and full proposal level prepared by National Agency, which subsequently are proposed to the DG Education and Culture.

According to the interviewed project promoters one of the main shortcomings in Procedure B is a big “paperwork”. Also when filling in the application forms is necessary to learn specific terminology, which is not used in reality (the same is valid for the procedure B). Thus is encouraged the formation of a group of freelance experts, who can guarantee a project award, as they are familiar with this specific terminology. This peculiarity of the procedure is pointed out as a proof to the underestimation of ideas versus form. An additional shortcoming of the application forms, which must be filled in when applying, is the requirement that the same idea is explained several times for different purposes. Very often this fact slows down the applying Bulgarian organizations.

According to the experts from the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency the promoters find it difficult to answer the concrete questions in the application form, which in their opinion is due to the fact that they do not have skills for explaining their ideas, for indicating the value added of the projects, for describing a strategy of distribution and evaluation of the final result and last but not least for setting measurable tasks. In their opinion the main reasons, which hamper the Bulgarian promoters in the project preparation process, are the lack of sufficient skills for the elaboration of projects under the “Leonardo da Vinci” programme, Slavic express and the way of thinking.

The main reason for the non selection of applicant projects is the lack of project proposal writing skills, the lack of foreign language skills, necessary when applying under Procedures B and C, the inability to correctly read the call for proposals and the lack of partners for the

implementation of the proposed project. In view of that it is necessary to have project proposals discussed and financial arrangements for each foreign and local project partner commitments before the submission of final version of project proposals.

In contrast with the shortcomings of the procedure for applying, the interviewed persons admit that they are satisfied with the work of the experts in the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency who have always expressed the readiness to consult them. The interaction between the European Commission and the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency, as well as between the latter and the beneficiaries is very good.

All interviewed representatives of organisations with awarded projects under the programme for the period 2000-2002 admit that exists regular monitoring. National agency performs monitoring on project promoters and they perform monitoring on the beneficiaries.

The compulsory requirement for co-financing by the project promoters guarantees that all participants in the programme will have serious approach and will help in the successful project implementation. Almost all interviewed persons admit that with the compulsory requirement for co-financing, the projects are much better developed and implemented in the determined terms and defined parameters.

According to the representatives of organizations with awarded projects under the programme the organization of preliminary meetings between the National Agency and the representatives of organizations, applying to the programme, contributes for the improvement of quality of the Bulgarian projects. At these meetings are discussed procedures, priorities and possible problems. These preliminary meetings are evaluated as means to avoid problems possible to arise at a later stage of the process of applying for funding under the programme. Thus questions will be answered which have not been thought of by the applying project promoter at the moment.

2. Centralized activities

Procedure C is totally centralized at European level and covers “*Reference material*” and “*Thematic actions*” measures and the projects submitted by European organisations under all programme measures. During the period 2000-2003 no Bulgarian organisations had awarded projects under Procedure C with the exclusion of only one project under “*Thematic actions*” in the year 2000. Therefore it is difficult to evaluate the role of the National Agency for project support in the management of the centralised measures.

B. Conclusions

The availability of comparatively small number of awarded projects to Bulgarian organisations under procedure B and C, respectively with semi-centralised or totally centralised management at European level does now allow us to compare the effectiveness of the centralised or decentralised project management. The fact that the envisaged funds under procedure B are totally used and 100% of the programme funds from entry ticket are successfully managed at national level indicate that decentralised management is more effective.

Almost all interviewed representatives of organisations with awarded projects estimate the experts from the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency as sufficiently competent and helpful. Despite this fact, a significant part of the respondents find as their shortcoming the lack of preliminary meetings between representatives of the National Agency and the applying organisations, which could have saved time and funds upon the preparation of the full project proposals and would have encouraged programme participation.

The experts from the National Agency, as well as the project promoters perform monitoring all the time.

The compulsory condition for co-financing from the project promoters is evaluated as a successful instrument for project management and programme management in general.

C. Conclusions

- It is necessary to simplify the language (terminology) used for describing the project ideas in order to stress on the idea itself rather than on the form of the submitted proposal.
- The decentralised project management is estimated as more effective due to the fact that it guarantees greater transparency of the procedures.
- It is necessary to increase the number of preliminary meetings between the representatives of the National Agency and the applying organisations in order to save time and funds upon submission of the pre-proposals.

IV. Financing and financial management

A. Analysis of factual data

Table 10

Distribution of the financial support of the Leonardo da Vinci II program in Bulgaria by years and measures (in EUR)

	2000	2001	2002	2003
<u>Total Procedure A:</u>	1 218 000	1 252 482	1 340 385	1 376 324
Placements	988 260	1 073 898	1 151 685	1 215 742
Exchanges	229 740	178 584	188 700	160 582
<u>Total Procedure B:</u>	1 944 784	1 415 436	2 205 966	2 202 438
Pilot projects	840 123	1 074 510	2 205 966	1 721 538
Language competences	1 104 661	340 926	0	480 900
Transnational networks	0	0	0	0
<u>Total procedure C:</u>	630 000	0	0	0
Thematic actions	630 000	0	0	0
Reference material	0	0	0	0
<u>Grand Total:</u>	3 792 784	2 667 918	3 546 351	3 578 762

Source: NA “Leonardo da Vinci”

The statistical data from Table 10 about the distribution of the financial support of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme in Bulgaria by years and measures indicate that every year the funds released under the programme for funding projects of Bulgarian promoters are constantly increasing. The main part of the programme funding is received on projects under procedure B (“*Pilot projects*” and “*Language competences*” measures), which are important for improving the quality of the vocational training and careers guidance, as well as for encouraging the language competences related to professional realisation. The other part of the financial support is received on projects under the “*Mobility*” measure, which provide opportunities to pupils, students, young workers, teachers and managers of Bulgarian enterprises to obtain vocational experience abroad, improve their language skills and establish professional contacts, which makes them more competitive on the Labour market in Bulgaria. It is a fact that the lack of practical experience of the young people is one of the reasons for the high level of youth unemployment in the country. The funded placements and exchanges under the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme reinforce the link between training and practice of young people and help in their successful realization on the labor market.

Every year of the period 2000-2003 the funds for “**Exchange**” constantly decrease, because of insufficient number of qualitative projects, submitted under this activity and reallocation of funds from “**Exchange**” towards “**Placement**” activity. The total number of beneficiaries under “**Exchange**” also deducts with an exception only in 2003. This means that less teachers and managers of SMEs in Bulgaria take advantage of the opportunity to exchange ideas and experience with colleagues from participating countries – EU member states, countries from the European association of free trade and of European economic zone, as well as pre-accession countries from Central and Eastern Europe.

Most of the interviewed representatives of organisations with funded projects as well as the beneficiaries under the “**Mobility**” measure find the released funds under the programme as insufficient. Main shortcoming at the projects implementation is the delay of funding, sometimes with 6 months, which puts the Bulgarian project partners in difficult position. Project co-financing is estimated by the majority of the respondents as strongly motivating factor for more effective utilisation of the programme funds, but the low living standard in Bulgaria, compared to the rest of other participating countries in the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme, explains the relatively small number of submitted project proposals by Bulgarian promoters. Understanding the meaning of *placements* and *exchanges*, some of the interviewed proposed to reduce the financial support but to provide more young people with the opportunity to take advantage of it and which threatens the decent stay of beneficiaries abroad.

B. Conclusions

- The successful project management within the programme is due to the strict control conducted by European commission as by National Agency and project promoters.
- The main shortcoming is the delay in trenches under “**Mobility**” measure project implementation in the area placements and exchanges of vocational experience and ideas.
- The annual change of the reporting and application forms is considered to be a shortcoming of the programme financial and administrative management.
- The compulsory requirement for co-financing is estimated as strongly motivating factor for more effective utilisation of the programme funds.
- The funds releases for mobility projects are insignificant.
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C. Recommendations

The main recommendations of the interviewed representatives of organisations, which have received funding under the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme and the beneficiaries could be summarized as follows:

- It is necessary to increase the funds released on mobility projects
- The financial procedures should be optimised in order to avoid delay of cash transfers to the project promoters and beneficiaries, as well as to the “Leonardo da Vinci” National Agency itself.
- The frequent change of reporting models has to be avoided because otherwise the financial management of the programme is hampered.
- Meetings between project promoters and partners before the submission of the final version of the project proposal are recommended in view of successful start and implementation of projects.

V. General conclusion

The main objective of the National report for the implementation of the “Leonardo da Vinci II” programme in Bulgaria for the period 2000-2003 is to evaluate the importance and contribution of the programme at national level, its effectiveness and efficiency. The implemented projects under the programme action period in Bulgaria have great importance for the: vocational experience abroad for youth; improvement of their language skills with professional orientation; enhancement of the cooperation between Bulgaria and the rest of the participating countries in the area of vocational education and training; exchange of experience and research of good European practices; upgrading the quality of the labour force vocational training in the services, tourism, agriculture and high technologies sectors; development of positive qualities in the young people such as accuracy, responsibility, preciseness, and personal interest as well as the creation of qualitative working force competitive within the expanded European Union Labor market.

The programme contribution at national level refers to its multiplication effect, which creates conditions for increased flexibility on the National Labor market. Nationally, the program is highly effective and efficient. It could be concluded that the professional education system is very dynamic and that the great duration of the projects, defined legislatively by the European Commission, brings in question the stability of the fulfilling projects in the future.

It is important to increase the financial support of the programme under the “*Mobility*” measure projects, which have the strongest influence on the upgrading of vocational experience of youth in Bulgaria.

All interviewed final beneficiaries and representatives of Bulgarian organizations, which have received grants for fulfilling their projects, accept “Leonardo da Vinci II” program very positively. This program is considered to be a common instrument for developing of innovations on a national and on a European level as well. As a participant in this European program Bulgaria represents a real member state of the European Union.

The information and analysis in the present national report could be used for improving the “Leonardo da Vinci” programme action until the end of the programme’s second phase. It will serve as a basis for the elaboration of the National report for Bulgaria in 2007, which main subject will be the study of the entire program effect in Bulgaria during the whole period of its action (2000-2006).